

The State of the US Mails

a Snapshot in Time

Purpose. Quite simply, the goal of this exhibit is to do what the title says: take a snapshot of the US mails, as it existed in 1909.

We selected 1909 because it a year of major change for the US postal system. Between the effective introduction of the Washington-Franklins, an active commemorative issuance schedule and a wide variety of production innovations ranging from coils to blue paper, the US mails were very different after 1909.

Why? This exhibit is being shown because I want to look deeply into the US postal system and try to cut across all the various elements that comprise it so we get a comprehensive view. We need to limit things to a single year since otherwise, the scope would be too large.

Treatment. Developing a treatment that works has been a challenge. This version of the exhibit is a further refinement of earlier versions.

This exhibit looks like postal history because we've decided on an organization that shares the typical layout of a postal history exhibit: the rates, routes, markings, for US originating mail. We then added three significant categories: the stamps and postal stationery used, the types of uses and how the mail was carried.

Why is everything being shown on cover? The answer is simple, only by showing items on cover, can we demonstrate what is really going on in the postal system. If you want to show how something is being used, show uses.

Alternatively, you might ask: why not show each major development, by itself, within the year?

We felt that if we did so, our review would turn into an exhibit of the "uses of the 1909 commemoratives" or "uses of blue paper stamps", or "uses of private perforations", or "EDUs of the 3rd Bureau Series", etc, etc, etc. Our goal is broad and is not an attempt to isolate a single element. We do not want to

isolate stuff. The US mails were very complicated and there were a great many things flying around at the same time: 2nd and 3rd Bureau issues, 1909 commemoratives, domestic and overseas uses, registered and special delivery, as well as 2nd & 3rd class mail, coexisting and appearing in the mailboxes of people all at the same time.

We specifically want a broad survey-like outlook on the mails of the period. We want to show things coming together and not a detailed focus on one single item or topic.

Importance. A single year, yet this "narrow" scope is compensated by the expansive breadth of its coverage across the entire philatelic range of the United States. Plus this single year was a very important year. Washington-Franklins, 3 new commemorative series, blue paper, widespread use of USPOD coils, Merry Widow in and then out. Mechanization, speed and reliability.

Knowledge, Study & Research. This exhibit has very significant breadth, as it ranges across the entirety of the US mails. The exhibitor needs to provide details of technical aspects of the stamps, indicia, cancels, printing related issues and the like.

The material comprising this exhibit covers has been extremely well trod by others, so much of the knowledge, study & research is secondary.

Rarity. Among the most important items in this exhibit are:

- EDUs for each of the 1909 commemorative issues: the Lincoln Memorial, the Seward and the Hudson-Fulton.

- EDUs for the 1908 issue Washington-Franklin 4¢ and 50¢ perforated sheet stamps. Also, the EDUs for the 1908 2¢ imperforate and 2¢ perforated coil issues.

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- EDUs for the 2¢ W-F blue paper and the Lincoln Memorial blue paper issue.
- EDU of the Lincoln Memorial with Schermack III perforations. There is also the US AV I (Lincoln Memorial).
- An Attleboro private vending coil, on cover. One of 4 recorded.
- Use of the Seward stamp for 2nd class magazine forwarding
- A Seward bisect on cover.
- A Canadian special delivery stamp used along with the 2¢ Lincoln Memorial stamp on the Lincoln first day, a unique mixed-franking use.
- 3 faked Lincoln Memorial FDCs. One of them, by the way, has a clean PF certificate. All three are wonderful covers, just a shame they are fakes.
- Several very scarce Alaska Yukon Expo cancels

Beyond these, we have included items from the 46 states, plus the territories of Arizona, New Mexico, Hawaii, Alaska, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Canal Zone, and even Wake Island.

Overseas destinations were selected to reflect treaty rates to the UK, Canada, Cuba and Germany, plus UPU rates to both usual and unusual destinations.

We've also sought to include examples of all the stamps and postal stationery available at the time, plus the various registry labels intended for either domestic or overseas use. Not to mention all the major machine cancellation marks and a wide assortment of hand cancels.

Much of this material is difficult to come by and the use of "easy" material from just the single year has been a significant challenge for the exhibitor.

Frequently, some of the material we show has to be somewhat "mundane", in order to maintain the treatment flow; we have, though, whenever possible, striven to select "ordinary" items that

have a "special" quality. As an example, for a mourning cover we just happen to use a Hudson Fulton EDU.

Condition. Given that many of these items are one- or few-of-a-kind, condition is as best as can be expected. The more common items were chosen for their condition and to still display a wide range of material.

Regarding the history of this exhibit. The treatment for this exhibit has been radically changed on three prior occasions. This version is version 3.5. The exhibit has been completely remounted, every write-up changed from the last time out, not a single page remains from any past versions.

If anything I say in the synopsis sounds defensive, please ignore. I really look forward to your thoughts and comments. My goal is to make this exhibit better. I welcome your help.

Sources:

This is no single reference we're aware of that serves as foundational background for this exhibit. It is difficult to think of just one or two key texts we could refer you to. Rather than make a specific suggestion of a text, we'd rather provide a listing of some of the resources we have used have-

- Robert Colby, *AFDCS Handbook of the USA 1909 Commemoratives on First Day Covers*
- Frederick Langford, *Standard Flag Cancel Encyclopedia, 4th edition*
- Richard W. Helbock, *United States Doanes*
- Steven Belasco, *Guide to United States Vending and Affixing Machine Perforations 1907-1927,*
- William J Bomar, *Postal Markings and Postal History of United States Expositions*
- Nicolas A. Lombardi *Census of U.S. Registry Exchange Labels (1883-1911)*, The US Specialist, June 2008
- Robert L. Markovits, *The Merry Widow, 10c Special Delivery Issue of 1908* [exhibit], 1996, APRL
- Henry W. Beecher & Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz, *U.S. domestic postal rates, 1872-1999*
- Anthony S. Wawrukiewicz & Henry W. Beecher, *U.S. international postal rates, 1872-1996*
- EDUs were checked versus the 2021 Scott Specialized.